

What is being done?

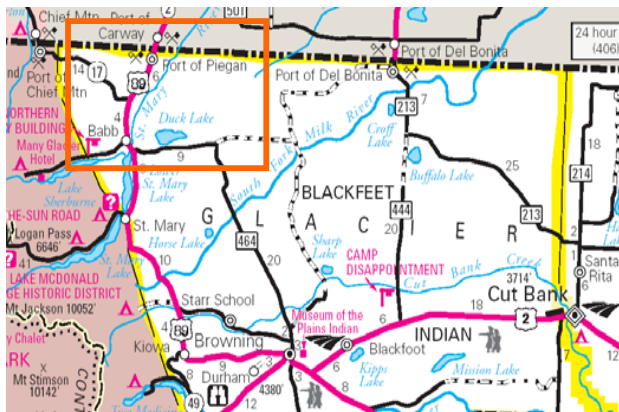
Catastrophic failure of the St. Mary irrigation project would cause irreversible environmental damage to the Blackfeet Reservation and economic loss to the Hi-Line. Preliminary figures from the US Bureau of Reclamation estimate it will take five to ten years to rehabilitate the St. Mary facilities at an estimated cost of \$125 million. Reclamation law requires Milk River irrigators to pay the majority of the operation and maintenance of this system. However, facility replacement costs exceed what irrigators can pay and domestic water and recreational benefits need to be considered.

Legislation has been submitted to the Montana Congressional Delegation seeking federal appropriations. More help is needed.



Buckled section of siphon removed in 2001.

Location of the St. Mary Rehabilitation Project



Look up other maps of the project area, dates and minutes of working group meeting, and other information at the:

St. Mary Working Group Web Site

<http://www.dnrc.state.mt.us/stmarycover.htm>

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ST. MARY REHABILITATION



The St. Mary facilities diverts water out of the Hudson Bay drainage from the St. Mary River into the north fork of the Milk River, which eventually drains into the Gulf of Mexico. The water is for municipal, irrigation, and recreation activities in the Milk River Basin. The diversion facilities and canal, which are owned and operated by the US Bureau of Reclamation, are located entirely on the Blackfeet Reservation in Glacier County. The facility has been in operation for 85 years with minimal repairs and is in danger of catastrophic failure.

In 2002, then Lt. Governor Ohs created the St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group to provide input to the State of Montana on finding a "workable solution" to rehabilitating the St. Mary Facilities. Governor Brian Schweitzer is in full support of the project, and the working group is co-chaired by Lt. Governor John Bohlinger.

Lifeline of the Hi-Line

May 2005

Importance of St. Mary Facility

On average, the system diverts approximately 150,000 acre-feet of water per year from the St. Mary River to the Milk River. Without this imported water, the Milk River would run dry in 6 out of every 10 years! Approximately 121,000 acres of Milk River Basin Land are irrigated with water imported from the St. Mary River. These irrigated lands contribute about \$15-17 million each year in increased alfalfa production alone, supporting many livestock operations in the region.

An additional 25,000 acres benefit from St. Mary River water. An estimated 14,000 individuals from the communities of Havre, Chinook, Harlem, and Fort Belknap derive their drinking water from the Milk River. An estimated \$15 million per year is derived in recreational benefits. The diversion also provides water supporting nationally significant migratory bird habitat.

Working Group Focus of Efforts

- Find a “workable” solution for rehabilitating the St. Mary facilities before the system suffers catastrophic failure;
- Work with the Blackfeet Tribe to address environmental impacts associated with operation of the St. Mary facilities and provide workable enhancements and mutual benefits from a rehabilitated St. Mary canal;

- Explore options for restoring Fresno Reservoir to its original storage capacity and reauthorizations and funding opportunities to rehabilitate Basin wide infrastructure.

Blackfeet Nation Concerns

The need to prepare studies to address environmental concerns relating to the operations of the St. Mary facilities on the Blackfeet Reservation including, but not limited to:

- Low flow outlet in Lake Sherburne Dam to allow low winter flows in Swiftcurrent Creek;
- Erosion and flooding at the confluence of Boulder and Swiftcurrent Creeks;
- Sedimentation in Lower St. Mary Lake and Bull Trout.

The need to receive benefits from the project include, but are not limited to employment opportunities, fish and wildlife habitat improvement, hydro generation, and economic development.



Concrete structure showing exposed rebar due to erosion.

Current Funding

- \$1,986,526 from the 2005 State Legislature. \$10 million in State General Obligation Bonds to match future federal dollars.
- Milk River Joint Board of Control and Walleyes Unlimited have contributed \$62,300 in matching funds.
- Counties and communities along the Hi-Line have pledged \$44,000 in matching funds.
- Seeking federal appropriations for bridge construction, engineering studies, address Tribal concerns, and construction of the preferred alternative.

Working Group Representatives

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Glasgow Irrigation District

Dolores Plumage,

Blaine County Commissioner

Gary Anderson

City of Chinook

Dave Peterson

Public Works Director, City of Havre

Kevin Salsbery

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